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Tom Cavanaugh's 100 Cups of Coffee

By [Anne Hamilton](#)

I have been saddened, along with the rest of the country, by the horrific shootings of 20 six and seven-year-old children at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. The tragedy of their deaths is almost unbearable. Listening to the breaking news, I felt like September 11th was unfolding all over again. All of us are trying to deal with our grief.

With the reports of the number of dead and injured came the question, "What can I possibly do to help at a time like this?"

My friend Tom Cavanaugh asked himself the same question and picked up the phone to do something. Out of empathy for the families and community whom he wanted to support, he thought of the daily needs they would have, and what would help them try to regain a sense of normalcy. "What do you do on a normal day?" he asked himself. "You go out for breakfast. I couldn't afford to buy everyone breakfast, but I thought, 'I could buy them a cup of coffee.'" He recalled seeing an image of the Newtown General Store on TV, and called them up. He paid for 100 cups of coffee for anyone stopping in the store. His compassion brought the store's manager to tears.

The store put up a sign in the window that said, "Coffee today has been donated by Tom Cavanaugh of Los Angeles, California". His kindness sparked a pay-it-forward mentality that has led many others to call businesses in Newtown and pay for other items like hot chocolate and candy for children and meals for law enforcement workers. Tom appeared on three television news programs, and the story has gone viral on the internet. You can view an interview at <http://losangeles.cbslocal.com/2012/12/17/ways-to-help-those-affected-by-connecticut-school-shooting/>

Tom has been one of my best friends for fifteen years. This gesture is typical of his caring attitude. For twenty years, he has been an overnight 911 operator, helping countless people during their emergencies. He uses downtime in the middle of the night to write plays, screenplays and novels. As a playwright, Tom always writes about subjects that matter, and he shows an uncanny ability to anticipate topics that matter to Americans. I have served as Tom's dramaturg for fifteen years, helping him to develop all of his scripts.

[This section has been removed and will be inserted in the future out of respect for the Newtown victims, family members, and their community.]

I have always believed that plays should deal with important and worthy subjects in a skilled manner. It's important to put something meaningful on the stage. As artists, we must use our power and opportunities to communicate insight and meaning. That is our privilege and our responsibility as artists and muses. We serve the nation as interpreters of national events and trends, and we can help our communities to process them. We ask the questions, and give some answers, but most important, we let our audiences draw their own conclusions. As theatre artists, my colleagues and I must continue to push the conversation and the nation's sensibilities forward. We do have an impact on our country's history and development.

It is so important to communicate our grief at this time, as well as our questions and feelings. Literature which deals with the topic of grief can be very helpful in times like these.

Let's share whatever resources we have, whether it's a good story, a conversation, or a cup of coffee. I wish great strength to everyone in this difficult time.